

# LABOUR CONDITIONS in the U.S.S.R.

An account submitted to  
the United Nations  
1955

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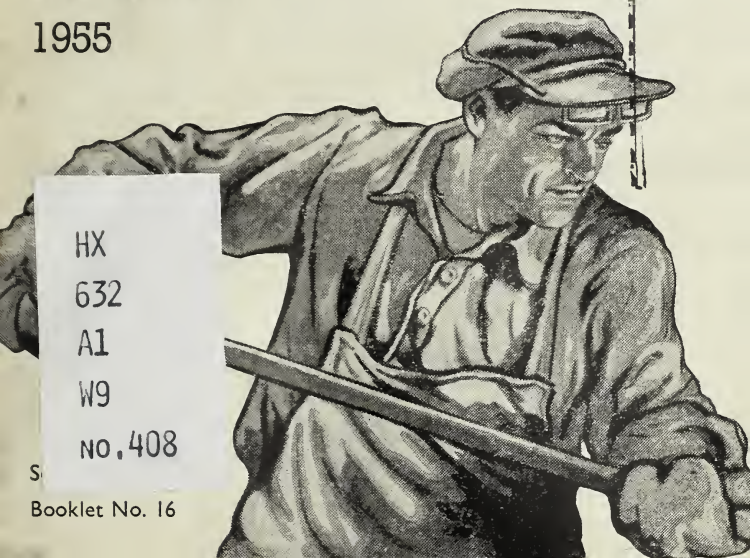
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## Foreword

*THE following account of labour conditions in the Soviet Union was submitted to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in April 1955.*

*It forms a section of the Preliminary Report on labour conditions in several countries issued by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Director-General of the International Labour Office, and has been circulated as an official United Nations document. (E/2699/Add. 1/17, May 1955.)*

## LABOUR CONDITIONS IN THE U.S.S.R.

AS A RESULT of the Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917, a social structure has been set up in the Soviet Union which rules out the exploitation of man by man. Lenin, the great founder of the Soviet State, said: "For the first time, after centuries of toil for others, of forced labour for exploiters, there is now the chance to work for oneself and, what is more, to make use of the latest achievements of technique and culture".

Real freedom of labour can mean only freedom from exploitation—the freedom to work for oneself and one's community rather than for exploiters. Man cannot exploit his fellow man in the U.S.S.R.

The workers and peasants of the U.S.S.R. have put an end to the profoundly unjust system under which one class owned the means of production and was able to lead a life of leisure as a result of the back-breaking toil of another class which did not own the means of production. Under the socialist system the means of production have ceased to be a means of exploitation.

The socialist economic system, based as it is on the national ownership of the means of production, has laid sound foundations for true freedom of labour for all members of society; it has eliminated all possibility of the exploitation of man by man, and has turned labour from the shameful servitude it was under the capitalist system into an honour for every able-bodied citizen.

The fact that the work is for the benefit of the worker and for the benefit of socialist society as a whole and the feeling of ownership of all means of production and of the country's natural resources which are exploited with a view to the fullest possible satisfaction of physical and cultural requirements of the nation, are in a socialist country a tremendous stimulus to the development of the productive forces and an inexhaustible source of creative energy among its workers.

All this tremendously enhances the workers' sense of human dignity, and allows full scope for individual initiative at work and in public life.

The right to work has been the greatest achievement of the working masses of the U.S.S.R., and it is laid down in the Constitution of the Soviet Union.

The U.S.S.R. Constitution (chapters I and X) establishes the basic legal principles governing the work of workers, employees and peasants. Article 118 of the Constitution stipulates:

*"Citizens of the U.S.S.R. have the right to work, that is, the right to guaranteed employment and payment for their work in accordance with its quantity and quality."*

*"The right to work—in the Soviet Union—ensured by the socialist organisation of the national economy, the steady growth of the productive forces of Soviet society, the elimination of the possibility of economic crises and the abolition of unemployment."*

The Soviet Union has achieved full employment of the able-bodied population. Rural migration and unemployment—the scourge of the mass of the workers in capitalist countries—have been eliminated once and for all. Soviet people do not know the privations of unemployment. The threat of dismissal or losing his livelihood does not hang over the Soviet worker. He faces the future with confidence and assurance.

Every citizen of the U.S.S.R. is free to apply himself in any branch of the economic, administrative, cultural or public and political life of the country, according to his own preferences and abilities.

In this connection, it is important to remember that articles 122 and 123 of the Constitution safeguard the equality of all citizens in employment, regardless of their nationality, race and sex.

The principles of the Constitution are embodied in the labour legislation including the labour code and the governmental decrees.

The workers of the Soviet Union, through their trade unions, take part in the formulation of laws dealing with production, labour, social services and cultural activities and they see to it that the laws are strictly applied.

The Soviet laws not only guarantee the right of the workers and employees to obtain work, but protect them from unjustified dismissal and transfers.

Where a worker has been wrongfully dismissed, he is reinstated in his former employment and is paid wages for the duration of his enforced idleness in the manner prescribed by law. The rights of members of factory, plant, mine, construction and local committees who while at work perform public duties entrusted to them by the members of their trade unions are also protected by law in the U.S.S.R.

The Soviet labour legislation reflects the will of the workers who are in power and who own the country's wealth, and it serves the interests of the Soviet people as a whole.

Article 119 of the Constitution of the U.S.S.R. establishes an eight-hour day for factory and office workers, a reduced working day of seven or six hours for arduous trades and of four hours in departments where conditions of work are particularly arduous.

The reduction of the working hours in the Soviet Union has nothing in common with such reductions in capitalist countries where it is accompanied by partial unemployment and reduced wages. In the U.S.S.R. the wages paid for a reduced working day remain the same as those paid for a normal working day.

Overtime work is prohibited in the U.S.S.R.

Exceptions are permitted only in cases where overtime work is required to ward off calamities, where the normal supply of power, water etc. to enterprises, establishments, towns and villages has been cut off by unforeseen circumstances and also where stoppage of work might result in deterioration of supplies and machinery. In such circumstances, overtime work is permitted only with the consent of the trade union organisations and to a strictly limited extent—for not more than four hours during any two consecutive days and for not more than 120 hours a year. Workers and employees are paid at higher rates for overtime work.

Special labour legislation governs women's labour in the U.S.S.R. Women may not be employed at particularly arduous work or work injurious to health. Special regulations limit certain activities by women, such as the weights they may carry. Women's wages

are not affected by any of these regulations, however, and women are paid equal wages with men.

Women have full access to all branches of the economic and public life and may follow the most difficult professions requiring extensive knowledge and qualifications.

Concern for the individual and for the conditions in which he lives and works is at the root of all Government action in the Soviet Union. Socialism has opened endless possibilities for the steady improvement of working conditions.

The systematic introduction of advanced production techniques and technology, and the widespread mechanisation of heavy and time-consuming work have helped to bring about optimum production conditions, to make work easier in every way and to eliminate the most arduous physical work.

In 1953, the production of machines and equipment was 3.8 times higher than in 1940, and 190 times higher than in 1913. In 1953 alone more machines and equipment were produced than during the total period of the first and second five-year plans. Between 1950 and 1953 the Soviet machine-building industry produced and put into use 2,200 new types of machines and mechanisms.

Since there is no unemployment in the U.S.S.R., machines do not compete with labour. The workers and peasants of the Soviet Union are ready and eager to learn new techniques and to use machines in production. The utilisation of machines has increased tremendously, not only in industry and transport but in agriculture, thereby making the work of the workers and peasants easier.

In addition to facilitating work, the steady technical progress in the Soviet Union has removed the causes of many occupational diseases and has made it possible to achieve an unprecedented degree of safety at work and healthy working conditions in enterprises.

Concerned as it is to ensure healthier and easier working conditions for factory and office workers, the Soviet Government allocates large sums for the introduction of safer and healthier working conditions in industry. To this end, almost 9,000 million roubles were spent in the Soviet Union between 1949 and 1954. As a result, occupational diseases dropped by 24 per cent in industry as a whole and by 30 per cent and more in the machine-building and oil industries and in railway transport.

Under Soviet law, the managers of enterprises, establishments and farms are severely called to account for any violations of the

labour rules and regulations in force. The trade unions supervise the application of the labour laws in all enterprises and establishments. The fact that the trade unions, the largest workers' organisation, have the right to supervise the application of labour laws is a clear indication of the extensive rights that the trade unions exercise in defending the workers' interests.

In addition to the State institutions concerned with the protection of labour, the trade unions in the Soviet Union have their own scientific research institutions where they make scientific studies of the problem and plan safe working conditions.

The trade unions' labour and safety inspectors have the power to issue compulsory instructions to directors of enterprises, for the purpose of preventing violations of the rules, standards and agreements designed to protect labour and to call them to account for any failure to comply with the labour safety laws.

The collective agreements concluded each year between the administrations of the enterprises and the trade union organisations provide for specific measures to afford greater protection of labour and to improve safety devices and industrial health and hygiene, which the administrations undertake to apply in the enterprises.

The collective agreements between the administration of the enterprise and the trade union organisations regulate all questions relating to the work, wages and living conditions of the workers. Under the collective agreement the two sides are bound to take the action necessary to ensure proper remuneration and constant growth of production and also to keep pace with the constantly growing educational and social needs of the workers and employees. In 1953, more than 53,000 collective agreements were concluded in U.S.S.R. enterprises.

A United States trade union delegation which visited the Soviet Union in 1951 stated the following about the working conditions of Soviet workers: "During our three weeks' stay in the Soviet Union we travelled through the country by bus, motor car, railway, by air, and by motor boat and cutter. We covered 5,000 miles. We saw and spoke to thousands of workers. The workers in the Soviet Union live well. We saw good equipment, modern machines and healthy and safe working conditions; the factories are airy and light and there is enough space between the lathes."\*

Hillard Ellis, a member of the United States trade union delegation said: "The working conditions of the Soviet worker are

\* Translation from Russian.

ideal compared with those prevailing in the United States plants I know. The plants in the major Soviet towns I visited struck me by their cleanliness, good ventilation and every imaginable safety device. I have seen a great deal for myself; I spoke to hundreds of workers in Leningrad, Stalingrad, Moscow, Zaporozhye, and nowhere did I come across the much talked of 'forced labour'. In fact the people of the U.S.S.R. work as if they were working for themselves. I never saw any of the sweatshops we are so familiar with in the United States.”\*

The workers of the Soviet Union have full opportunity for educational advancement and raising their qualifications.

The Soviet Union has rid itself forever of the grim heritage of the past—the all but total illiteracy of the millions of workers and peasants which marked pre-revolutionary tsarist Russia.

The development of national education is one of the chief means of raising the cultural and technical level of the workers. A transition is being made in the U.S.S.R. from the current compulsory universal seven-year education to compulsory secondary (ten-year) education. The time is near when the entire younger generation of the Soviet Union, both in towns and villages, will have a secondary or ten-year education with the result that education and working conditions will improve still further.

The Soviet Government spares no expense to bring about what amounts to a cultural revolution, and increases the allocations for the purpose from year to year. The State budget of the U.S.S.R. for 1955 includes an allocation of 1,469,000 million roubles for social and cultural purposes.

A wide network of schools and courses where millions of workers increase their skills at the Government's expense while continuing at work, have been set up throughout the country. In 1954 alone, 7.7 million persons increased their skills through individual and group study and by joining study courses.

Enormous opportunities for vocational training and specialisation in various fields are open to young men and women. A wide network of various technical institutes and industrial schools provides for the general and technical education of young workers. The training at these schools is free of charge and the students are wholly maintained by the Government which provides them with food, clothes, shoes, textbooks and school supplies. In addition, the students receive cash remuneration for their work.

The young men and women who enter these schools choose

\* Translation from Russian.

their profession freely in the knowledge that on leaving they will be offered posts in State enterprises which are in full accord with their specialty and qualifications.

Graduates of trade schools and factory-training schools have their travel expenses (including transport of luggage) to their places of work paid in full and are given an allowance to cover their expenses during the journey. It is the duty of the management of each enterprise to furnish young workers with proper dwellings equipped with furniture, bedding and various facilities. Young workers who are trade school graduates are entitled to a one month holiday with pay at the cost of the enterprise and are guaranteed wages commensurate with their qualifications.

In 1954 over 700,000 young skilled workers graduated from factory-training schools, trade, railway and mining schools and trade schools offering special courses and courses in agricultural mechanisation, and were given work in accordance with the trade they had learned.

The U.S.S.R. has labour legislation concerning juveniles, which safeguards the health of the growing generation and fully takes into account the needs of their normal physiological development.

The employment of persons under the age of sixteen is prohibited in the Soviet Union.

No person under the age of eighteen may be employed without a preliminary medical examination. Subsequently, young workers are given periodic medical check-ups.

It is forbidden under Soviet law to employ persons under the age of eighteen for work which involves a severe physical strain and is injurious to the health.

The Soviet State provides all the necessary conditions to enable the working people to enjoy physical and cultural recreation. In accordance with the existing labour legislation, workers and employees who have completed eleven months of employment have a holiday with pay of not less than two weeks, while workers in many professions have longer—from eighteen to forty-eight working days. A network of sanatoria and holiday homes has been established in the U.S.S.R. Under the social insurance scheme alone, in 1954 over 3 million workers and employees spent their holidays in such places travelling either free of charge or at reduced rates.

The Soviet system of social insurance plays an important part in improving the working conditions and the general welfare of workers and employees.

Under the U.S.S.R. State budget for 1955, State expenditures on social security and social insurance and also on assistance to mothers of large families and unmarried mothers total nearly 46,000 million roubles, while an additional sum of more than 2,000 million roubles has been allocated for workers' and employees' travelling expenses to sanatoria and holiday homes, for the construction, equipment, expansion and maintenance of these rest homes and sanatoria, and for the carrying out of child health protection during the summer months.

Workers and employees in the Soviet Union are exempt from the payment of contributions of any kind to the social insurance scheme. In the Soviet Union, social insurance funds are made up of insurance contributions payable by undertakings, agencies and organisations.

The administration of social insurance in the Soviet Union is carried out wholly by workers' organisations—the trade unions—i.e. directly by the workers and employees themselves. The trade unions encourage large numbers of workers and employees to take an active part in the work of the social insurance committees in factories, plants and agencies.

Workers in the U.S.S.R. receive free medical assistance. By the end of 1954 there were in the U.S.S.R. some 300,000 doctors and nearly 900,000 medical workers with lower qualifications. The number of hospitals, maternity homes, dispensaries and other medical institutions which serve the working people increases from year to year.

State expenditures on health and physical culture are increasing steadily and amount to 30,500 million roubles for 1955.

Because of the rise in the Soviet people's material and cultural levels of living and the improvement of the medical services, mortality in the Soviet Union in 1953 was less than half what it had been in 1927 and less than one-third the figure for 1913. The real annual population growth in the Soviet Union is more than 3 million persons. Soviet trade unions take an active part in the development of the public health service, promote the extension of clinics and hospitals at plants and factories and supervise the organisation of medical services for workers and employees in those undertakings.

The tremendous sums expended by the State for social and cultural needs and the social insurance of workers and employees are an important factor in the steady growth of real wages. These expenditures by the State raise the real income of the workers

and employees by about one-third of the sum which they receive in the form of individual wages.

In the Soviet Union, where the means of production are not privately owned but are the property of society as a whole, the people's welfare depends on the increased productivity of the national labour force. The higher the level of national labour productivity, the more rapid is the increase in the people's welfare. For this reason, Soviet citizens, no matter in which sector of the national economy they are employed, are interested in augmenting industrial output and in organising production on a larger scale, for they know from their own experience that the more goods they produce, the higher their level of living. For this reason, each individual worker and the State as a whole are interested in furthering a constant development of the country's economy, so that the private and public interests of the working people are at one.

On the basis of this steady increase in output, the Soviet Government is carrying out a consistent policy of lowering the prices of consumer goods, thus greatly contributing to the increase in the real income of the workers, employees and peasants.

During the post-war years, prices of manufactured articles and foodstuffs have been reduced seven separate times, to the great benefit of the population. The five-year plan for the development of U.S.S.R. economy provided for a reduction of retail prices by 23.5 per cent over five years. Yet, taking into account the reduction of prices in 1954, in only four years of the five-year plan prices have already been reduced by more than 25 per cent i.e. the level of living of the Soviet population is being raised more rapidly than provided for in the five-year plan. As a result, the quantity of goods purchasable for 1,000 roubles in 1947 now costs 433 roubles; in other words, the consumer has 567 roubles left for increased purchases or savings. In 1953, as compared with 1940, workers' deposits in savings funds had increased by more than five times and amounted to 38,600 million roubles. In 1954 alone, these deposits increased by a further sum of almost 10,000 million roubles.

In 1954 the real wages of all workers and employees in the U.S.S.R. increased by 74 per cent as compared with 1940, while, if account is taken of State expenditure on cultural and social services to the working people, their total income doubled during this period.

Owing to the development of all branches of the national

economy, the country's national income has been steadily rising.

In the Soviet Union the entire national income is the property of the working people. Nearly three-fourths of it is spent on workers' personal, physical and cultural requirements, and the remainder is used to expand socialist production and to meet other nation-wide and public needs.

In tsarist Russia, the working people comprised 84.1 per cent of the population and received only 25 per cent of the national income, while the capitalist classes, which formed 15.9 per cent of the population, appropriated 75 per cent of the national income.

The Soviet Union's planned socialist economy rules out any possibility, present or future, of inflation, economic crises or unemployment. The monetary system in our country, resting as it does, on the growing might of our planned socialist economy, with its steadily increasing output of goods designed for peaceful general consumption, has been steadily gaining in stability. Constant attention is being paid in the Soviet Union to the improvement of workers' housing conditions. Since the Second World War, dwellings with a total area of over 240 million square yards have been built in cities and towns for workers and employees, while more than 4½ million houses for collective farm workers and rural intelligentsia have been constructed in the countryside. In 1954 alone State undertakings and agencies, local Soviets, and the population of cities and workers' settlements, with the aid of credits extended by the State, built dwellings with a total area of more than 38,500,000 square yards. The State construction programme for 1951 to 1955 includes the construction of new dwellings with a total area of more than 38 million square yards. In addition, 470,000 new dwellings were built in rural areas. The State construction programme for 1951 to 1955 includes the construction of new dwellings with a total area of approximately 126 million square yards.

Rent and utilities are not an important item in the budget of a Soviet worker's family, since they average only 4 per cent of the worker's wages. That in itself is an essential condition for raising the level of real wages.

It is worth noting that the Soviet citizens' right to private ownership of their earnings and savings, their own dwellings and subsidiary home enterprises, articles of domestic economy and use and articles of personal use and convenience, as well as the right to inherit personal property, is protected by law (Article 10 of the Constitution).

The planned and crisis-proof nature of the Soviet economy, the constant increase in the purchasing power of the population, the regular and rational utilisation of manpower and the means of production in State-owned industry, the absence of parasitic consumption by certain groups of the population which live by exploiting the labour of others, all contribute to the accelerated development of the U.S.S.R.'s national economy and to a rapid accumulation of wealth.

In 1953 the volume of industrial output of the U.S.S.R. was almost sixteen times larger than that in 1929. In 1954 the total gross industrial output of the U.S.S.R. increased by 13 per cent as against 1953 and by 65 per cent as against 1950. This increase and the further expansion of industrial output provided for in the production plan for 1955 make it certain that the goals set in the Fifth Five-Year Plan, providing for an increase in industrial production by some 70 per cent in 1955 as compared with 1950, will be attained ahead of time.

During the post-war period the Soviet State's outlay on capital construction, which is proceeding on a tremendous scale, has amounted to over 900,000 million roubles. During this time over 8,000 large State-owned industrial undertakings have been reconstructed or built and put into operation. The steady rise of production in the U.S.S.R. is accompanied by a constant increase in the numbers of workers and employees. From 10.8 million in 1928 the number of workers and employees in the national economy of the U.S.S.R. had risen to 47 million persons by the end of 1954.

In accordance with the dictum of the great founder of our State—Lenin—that the electrification of the entire national economy must constitute the technical basis of industrial and agricultural production, electrification is being carried out on a vast scale in the Soviet Union. The construction in the U.S.S.R. of the largest hydro-electric plants in the world bears testimony to this fact. All this is bound to result in the further improvement of the working conditions of the workers, peasants and employees in the Soviet Union.

Soviet citizens see and feel that they are the true masters of socialist undertakings and they are therefore vitally interested in the work of their section, department and undertaking. They see in the general amelioration of the national economy a way to increase still further their personal well-being and the welfare of their native land.

Large-scale socialist emulation, which has become a mass

movement in productivity in our country, is a clear manifestation of the creative initiative of the workers and of the fact that they pursue their constructive endeavours in entire freedom.

Soviet trade unions organise and lead socialist emulation among the workers, directing their efforts towards devising and evolving improvements in production which will further increase labour productivity and improve the living conditions of Soviet citizens.

In 1954 alone Soviet workers submitted a great many suggestions aimed at improving the processes of production and working conditions. Over 900,000 such inventions, technical improvements and efficiency suggestions have been accepted and introduced into the national economy.

It will therefore be seen that in the U.S.S.R., where the means of production and the power of government are in the hands of the people, the fruits of their labour belong to the people and that, private and public interests being in harmony, the free labour of free Soviet citizens is essentially creative. The constructive character of their work, the broad and certain prospects of a further rise in their material and cultural level of living, and the improvement of their working and living conditions inspire the working people of the Soviet Union to carry on with the realisation of their great plans for peaceful communist construction.

The working masses of the U.S.S.R. have learned from their own experience that the socialist State defends their vital interests; consequently, all its measures meet with their warmest support.

While constantly concerned with further improving working conditions within its own borders, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as a member and as one of the founders of the United Nations, also actively collaborates with other States members of the United Nations in working out international measures aimed at helping to improve the position of workers in all countries.

The Soviet regime has emancipated the individual and has made possible a flowering of personal and collective creativeness. It has created all the requisite conditions for the fullest development of the gifts and talents of millions of workers in the Soviet Union.

Engaged in peaceful creative labour, the Soviet people look to the future with courage and confidence. In its free and peaceful labour, which strengthens the cause of peace and amity among nations, the Soviet Union enjoys and will continue to enjoy the support of all the peoples of the world.

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